Findings on Disability / Health Functioning
The 'unseen, unheard and uncounted' in Pakistan

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The importance of providing an 'inclusive education system' to all children is widely recognised and voiced (United Nations 2006)1. However, the very first step towards achieving the much talked about goal of raising learning outcomes for all is surely identifying all the children in the first instance and then targeting those who are not learning. In identifying and rectifying this vicious circle of disadvantage, we argue that there is a need to focus on potentially the most marginalised individuals in Pakistan—children and youth with disabilities—who are likely to face multiple disadvantages. The Global Monitoring Report (2013-14) shows children who are at a higher risk of disability are less likely to be attending school. For example, in Iraq, the Report highlights that whilst 10% of 6-10 year olds who were not at risk of disability had never been to school compared to 19% with a risk of hearing impairment, and 51% with mental disability in 20062.

The area of disability and special education has remained fragmented in Pakistan. There is no comprehensive legal and policy apparatus to protect the rights of people with disabilities. It has singularly chalked out in 25-A legislations in all provinces (KPK not passed yet) and ICT and the post 2015 proposed goal/targets Muscat and SDGs3. Early efforts to provide for the needs of persons with disabilities were initiated in 1981 with the promulgation of “Disabled Persons (Employment and Rehabilitation) Ordinance 1981”, which was primarily in response to the United Nations (UN) proclamation of the year 1981, as the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYDP). Over three decades later, the ordinance remains poorly implemented. In recent past, the Government of Pakistan introduced the “National Policy for Persons with Disabilities” in 2002 followed by “National Plan of Action (NPA) for Persons with Disabilities” legislated in 2006. These efforts lost momentum in the wake of 18th Amendment to the Constitution which devolved powers from the federal government to the provinces leading to a fragmentation of responsibilities and the lack of coherent and comprehensive planning. Even in provincial laws and sector plans, no reference is made to the needs of special children. The Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act is perhaps the first act to address education of children with disabilities under the purview of “special education”, which it defines as “educational programmes and practices designed for students, as handicapped or gifted students, whose mental ability, physical ability, emotional functioning, require special teaching approaches, equipment, or care within or outside a regular classroom”(p. 2).

Thus in this context, where this area is largely being ignored and little knowledge is available about the prevalence of children with disabilities, ASER Pakistan, for the first time this year, took the initiative to capture data on the status of disability prevalence in Pakistan. To achieve this objective, research expertise from academics based at the University of Cambridge was used to devise seven key questions on disability and health and functioning. These questions drawing on the Washington Group Short Survey of Disability were included in the ASER survey and were designed to be piloted in a sample of surveyed households. The questions focused on assessing a child’s functioning in the following six areas: sight, hearing, mobility, self-care, speech and memory. Questions which captured the child’s use of any assistive aids such as spectacles, hearing and mobility aids etc, were also included. In addition to these, questions aimed at the individual within the household, additional questions were included in the school observation questionnaire to quantify whether schools were aware of the presence of children with disabilities in their settings and also whether they have any kind of specific facilities for children with disabilities (such as ramps, modified teaching and learning materials). As a pilot study, the questionnaire was administered by ASER volunteers in 9 districts (some rural and urban areas): Quetta Rural, Quetta Urban, Shikarpur Urban, Bajaur Agency Rural, Peshawar Urban, Lahore Rural, Lahore Urban, Multan Rural, Multan Urban. Whilst this is an unprecedented initiative, it is fraught with challenges and lessons and the

1 As suggested in a report by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (2002:5)
4 http://www.rtepakistan.org/
The graph collating findings from all 9 districts indicates that there is a significant incidence of reported disability across the different competencies. Almost 8% of the sample from which these data are drawn, report difficulties in seeing ranging from mild to significant. The incidence of hearing, mobility, speech and memory are reported to be 5% among the sample who were asked the questions on health and functioning. A significantly large number of individuals also report using aids to assist their functioning. How do these figures compare to prevalence across the world? According to one estimate, 93 million children under age 14, or 5.1% of the world’s children, were living with a ‘moderate or severe disability in 2004. Of these, 13 million, or 0.7% of the world’s children experience severe disabilities’ (Box 1.2.3 in GMR, 2013-14: p. 56). The prevalence of reported disability ranges from 3% in Uzbekistan to as much as 49% in the Central African Republic (GMR 2013-14: p. 56). The reported figures from this pilot initiative undertaken by ASER, therefore, are not too far off the mark and provide a first snapshot of the incidence of disability amongst children (3-16) in these regions in the country.

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1 It must be noted that for the purposes of this note, the range of difficulty reported – ‘some’ or mild difficulty to inability to function at all – are all collated due to small sample sizes.